

(FT. LAUDERDALE)--- Congressman Allen West (R-FL) released this statement today regarding SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, otherwise known as the food stamp program:

“I happened to drive by a gas station in Pompano Beach, Florida over the weekend, in the heart of Congressional District 22, the district I represent.

In front of the gas station were large banners proclaiming, 'We accept EBT SNAP cards.' This is not something we should be proud to promote.

EBT refers to Electronic Benefit Transfer, an electronic system that allows state governments to provide food and cash benefits via a plastic debit card.

These food and cash benefits were mandated in 1964, when the United States Congress passed the Food Stamp Act, to create an office in the United States Department of Agriculture to oversee a national food assistance program and require states to provide food benefits.

The original intent of the Food Stamp Act was to provide monetary assistance for low-income families and individuals to buy healthy food, and in so doing, boost the domestic agricultural sector. SNAP determined that important items in a healthy diet are expensive in the United States and through the program, attempted to round out Americans' diets. SNAP was never intended to cover all of the food costs of a given household.

This program has expanded well beyond its original intent and expanded to a far greater percentage of Americans.

Now we see a growing number of businesses in this country, including sit-down and fast food restaurants, standalone and gas station convenience markets, and even pharmacies eager to accept SNAP benefits.

The number of businesses certified in the SNAP program have gone from around 156,000 to more than 200,000 in five years, and food stamp benefits have ballooned from \$28.5 billion to \$64.7 billion.

This is a highly disturbing trend.

Food stamps were intended to provide a safety net for the small percentage of Americans who needed assistance. But since President Obama's inauguration, the number of Americans receiving assistance has increased by 45 percent.

Hardworking American taxpayers are carrying the burden of the President's failed economic policies, and as more and more Americans rely on handouts from the government, we see how the safety net has become a comfortable hammock.

Nearly 46 million Americans, more than the entire population of Canada or Italy, receive food stamps in the United States.

Every additional American who must rely on a government program is further proof that our economic and fiscal policies are failing, and creates an additional burden on the hardworking taxpayers who must foot the bill.

The measure of success for our social safety net programs should be that fewer and fewer Americans must rely on them, not more and more.

We must put in place the correct fiscal, tax and economic policies to reverse these trends, lest we continue on the slippery slope to economic dependence on a "nanny state" with astronomical and unsustainable levels of spending."

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